



far east

MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

SYNOD ON AMAZONIA

The challenge
to the Church
to listen

BAPTISED + SENT

Marking Pope Francis'
Extraordinary
Month of Mission

FINDING NEW WAYS

Hearing both
the cry of the earth
and the cry of the poor

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THE FAR EAST

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

To promote an awareness of the missionary dimension of the Church among readers; to report on the work of Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries; and to seek spiritual and material support for missionaries.

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Front Cover

Jaguar in the Amazon Jungle.
(Photo: Shutterstock)



PERMANENT QUESTIONS BUT CHANGING ANSWERS

People sometimes ask 'Why did you become a missionary?' What made about 12 of my 45 classmates in secondary school decide that they wanted to be missionary priests? Granted, within a few years more than half of them decided they didn't. The decision of those who did was probably influenced, indirectly, by a decree going back to the Council of Florence (1438-45). This declared that outside the Catholic Church there was no salvation. The desire to save souls was compelling for many.

I joined the Columbans in September 1962; the Second Vatican Council began in October. Soon some of our certainties were challenged by what came out of the Council. Pope John XXIII said the Church needed fresh air. Some of this was provided by people with names like Rahner, Ratzinger, Häring and Murray. We were assured that Jews could be saved, and Muslims, and even atheists if they sincerely tried to live good lives. That may have undermined the motivation of a few whose only goal was conversion. It made all of us ask questions and examine motivations: What does it mean to be a missionary today? How should we relate to other religions? What does salvation mean? Jesus didn't say to Zachaeus "You will go to Heaven when you die" but "Today salvation has come to your house."

In 2019 some 29 Columbans celebrate their 25th/50th/60th jubilees. Between them they have accumulated 1,354 years of service to mission. Some have participated

in the founding of about 130 new parishes in Korea, others help dignify the lives of the poor in the Philippines and Latin America or give patient witness to the Gospel in a Japan that shows limited interest in what they have to offer. Circumstances differ greatly. We are links in a chain, to use the image of John Henry Newman, one that goes back to Galilee. We do not, however, have copper-fastened models for continuing that chain. St Francis Xavier is often cited as a missionary model. A recent superior general of the Jesuits said that while we admire his work and enthusiasm we would not use his methods today.

Pope Francis, who has called on Christians to make 2019 a year of renewal of their enthusiasm for mission, is clearly a friend of mission and probably will shortly have more to say on the subject. Sometimes it is worth paying attention to the basics voiced by the less friendly. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was on to something when he said, "If one could see these glad tidings of your Bible written on your faces you would not need to talk so much about the truth of that book ..."

Fr Alo Connaughton is a former editor of the Far East magazine. Ordained in 1969, he is now involved in the formation of seminarians in Thailand and China.

Pictured above is a gathering of some of the 41 Columban priests and 18 Columban lay missionaries under the age of 50 in Manila in 2016.





BAPTISED + SENT

Fr Tom O'Reilly considers the Extraordinary Month of Mission announced by Pope Francis for October and explains why missionary vocation is now understood to be rooted, not in priestly ordination or religious profession, but in our common baptism.

The Extraordinary Month of Mission, announced by Pope Francis, marks the centenary of the promulgation of Pope Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud* in 1919, a most significant document in the evolution of missionary understanding and practice in the Catholic Church. In the wake of the devastation of World War I, Benedict wanted to encourage missionaries severely depleted in number and faced with a widespread scepticism about a Christianity which had not prevented Christian nations from slaughtering one another. He also put forward new methods for evangelisation.

Mission at that time had been greatly influenced by Western colonial expansion. The Pope reminded missionaries that their task is not to promote the interests of any nation, but to preach the Gospel with a deep faith commitment to Jesus Christ. He appealed to missionary congregations to cooperate with one another, rather than jealously guarding their own 'mission territories.' The importance of missionary cooperation was also seen in the steps Benedict took to bring together previously independent national organisations of lay Catholics who provided spiritual and financial support for overseas mission. Perhaps Benedict's most far-reaching decision was to begin internationalising the leadership of the Church. He told missionary bishops and religious superiors, all of

whom belonged to a Western culture, that they must build up the local church and train local leaders who could better proclaim the Christian message in ways that appeal to people of their own culture.

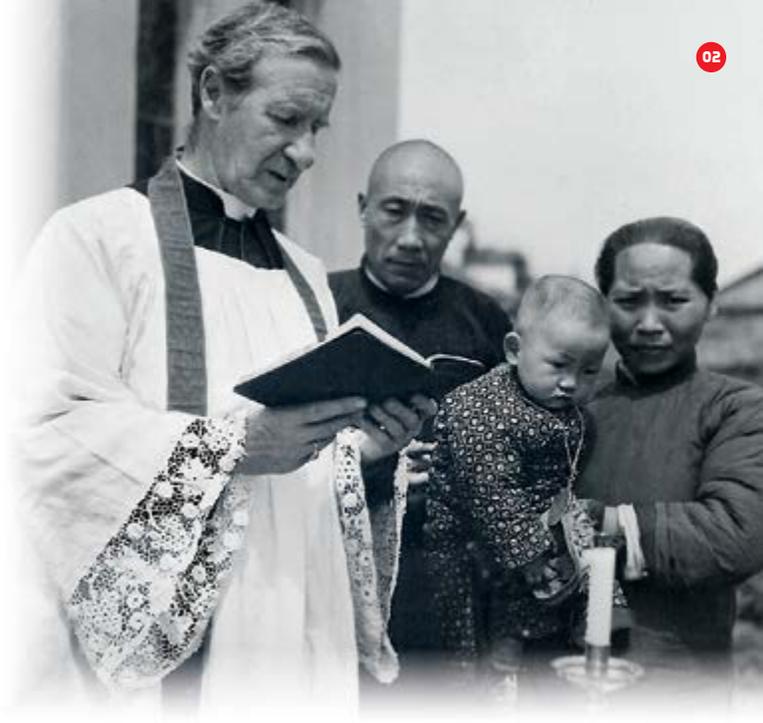
While some of the language and theology of *Maximum Illud* reflects its own time, it questioned the Eurocentric model of mission with its colonial mind-set and thus sowed seeds for a new understanding and practice in subsequent years. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), reflecting on the Church's ongoing missionary experience, was a key moment in the emergence of a new paradigm for mission. Half of the church leaders at that Council were natives of so-called 'mission countries,' a situation due in no small measure to Benedict XV's courage and foresight in promoting local churches immersed in their own cultures. Their contribution at the Council greatly influenced the direction of mission.

At the risk of oversimplification, we can outline some of the elements of the new emerging model of mission. Firstly, there is now a fuller understanding of the salvation proclaimed by Jesus, which involves more than saving souls for the hereafter. Salvation includes a liberation and transformation in the here and now, affecting not only individuals, but also social structures, cultures, religious traditions and indeed the whole of creation. The Church has a prophetic role to play in our world, standing in solidarity with the poor, the excluded, and the exploited earth. Secondly, the Christian faith has to find expression in the lived experience of every culture, not just Western culture. God's Spirit is already present in peoples' cultures and religious traditions, long before missionaries arrive on the scene. So, along with witnessing to one's own faith in Christ, mission becomes a search for the signs of the Spirit's activity

in the situation to which one is sent. Missionaries are learners, called to co-operate with what God is doing, particularly among the poor and the excluded of our world. Thirdly, the essential missionary nature of the Church means that each local church, no matter how needy, is called to be a sending and receiving church in the service of mission. Mission is no longer a one-way flow from mother churches to daughter churches, but a mutually enriching exchange between sister churches. Fourthly, the missionary vocation is now seen to be rooted, not in priestly ordination or religious profession, but in our common baptism. Every baptised Christian is a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ, called to live out one's own missionary vocation, along with supporting the missionary vocation of others.

Pope Francis hopes the Extraordinary Month of Mission will revitalise the Church in answering the still urgent call to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all nations. As he said in his own Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013, the Church is missionary by nature and must be permanently in a state of mission. He wants every local church to have a missionary option, "so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for self-preservation." A renewed commitment to the Church's 'mission to the nations' can engender fresh inspiration and enthusiasm both for the pastoral care of the faithful and the new evangelisation in 'Christian' countries. The motto for the Extraordinary Month of Mission is 'Baptised and Sent,' a reminder that every member of the Church is called to share in the mission of Jesus.

Some of the challenges the Church faces in mission today are not unlike those addressed by Benedict XV in 1919: excessive nationalism, militarism and armed conflicts, spread of globalised Western culture, exploitation of peoples and their environment for economic gain, racism and exclusion, and scepticism about a Church which at times falls very short of the Gospel ideals it preaches. The missionary task can be quite



daunting. But, as Francis often reminds us, mission is effective when it is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus living in his Church, whose Spirit guides and energises us for the mission of God. ●

Fr Tom O'Reilly is a scripture scholar. He has worked as a Columban missionary in Pakistan and has also been Regional Director in Britain.

- 01. A priest baptises a newborn at a church in Manzianna in Italy. (Shutterstock)
- 02. Co-founder of the Columbans, Bishop Edward Galvin, carrying out a baptism in China in the early years of the Society.
- 03. Columbans Peter Woodruff (l) and Warren Kinne (r) visiting the You Dao Foundation in China where they met children of migrants.

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